United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 100th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 134 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1988 No. 152

House of Representatives

OMNIBUS DRUG INITIATIVE ACT OF 1988

SPEECH OF

HON. EDWARD R. MADIGAN

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 21, 1988

Mr. MADIGAN. Mr. Speaker, I urge the adoption of the Omnibus Drug Initiative Act of 1988.

We all realize that the solution to the problem of both alcoholism and drug addiction is complex. It requires a multifaceted approach to reach the many different aspects of the problem. This bill represents such an approach.

One of the provisions of the bill which I believe holds out great promise is the provision to encourage the establishment of recovery housing for individuals recovering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. Chairman WAXMAN and I included, as part of the block grant treatment provisions of this bill a mandatory set-aside of $100,000 in each State to establish a revolving fund to provide loans to start self-run and self-supported recovery housing throughout the country. We did so because we believe that we have discovered a cost-effective program that has had great sucess in reducing relapse—a phenomena that makes recovery from alcoholism or drug addiction so frustrating I want to take a few minutes to share with my colleagues what we have learned.

Thirteen years ago a group of recovering individuals in the Washington, DC, area responded to the closing of a Government run half-way house by assuming the lease on that half-way house and running it on their own. They called the operation Oxford House. Today over 200 recovering individuals live in 18 such houses in the Washington, DC, area and 1 in Bethlehem, PA. Fifteen are for men and four are for women.

Each is an alcohol and drug free group house rented by recovering individuals and democratically run on a self-supporting basis. Each house was started by borrowing enough money for the first month's rent and a security deposit. Within 2 years each house has repaid the money it had borrowed. The repayment of startup loans has permitted loans for new houses to get started.

Self-run and self-supported addiction recovery houses—such as Oxford House—hold out great promise as a cost-effective way to help addicted individuals who want to recover. Such houses provide the kind of support necessary for most addicted individuals during the first year or so of their recovery.

In the Washington, DC, area each of the 18 Oxford Houses has to turn away between 15 and 20 new applications for membership each week because they are fully occupied. Oxford House is constantly opening new houses but because it generates all of its funds internally it takes time to accumulate the first month's rent and security deposit needed to rent another house. In the Washington housing market the rent for 1 month and the security deposit total between $4,000 and $5,000. Once a house is started that money is paid back but it takes about 2 years. The State revolving funds established by this bill will enable the establishment of such houses throughout the country by providing an outside loan source to start new recovery houses.

I ask unanimous consent, Mr. Chairman, that a brief explanation of Oxford House, a more detailed description of three of the existing Oxford Houses and the results of a survey concerning all Oxford House residents be printed in the RECORD immediately following my remarks.

The principle of self-help has already made a great contribution in dealing with the problems of both alcoholism and drug addiction. Alcoholics anonymous in its half-century of existence has saved millions of lives and has groups in nearly every community in the country. Nan Robertson, a New York Times reporter reports in her recent book."Getting Better; Inside Alcoholics Anonymous" that AA now has 2 million members in 63,000 groups in 114 countries around the world and its numbers are now doubling every 10 years.[1] On Labor Day weekend an organization for drug addicts similar to AA—narcotics anonymous—held its annual convention in Anaheim, CA and 11,000 members from all over the United States were there. Together AA and NA have demonstrated that for those who want to recover from addiction to alcohol or drugs the self-help path to recovery is available.

Unfortunately not every addicted individual is able to recover by using AA or NA alone. Even after detoxification and in-patient rehabilitation many need to live in an alcohol and drug free environment for some time in order to avoid relapse—the return to addiction.

For the past 13 years Oxford House has demonstrated that an alcohol and drug-free living environment can be provided in a cost-effective manner. That living environment enables many recovering individuals, who might otherwise return to using drugs or alcohol, to stay clean, and become successful members of AA or NA. The loan concept, in this bill provides the catalyst to replicate recovery housing throughout the country without taking anything away from the self-help concept that makes Oxford House work.

Under this bill, each State revolving fund can provide startup loans of up to $4,000—to be repaid within 2 years—to individuals who want to start a recovery house. The number of individuals in an Oxford House ranges from 6 to 15 depending upon the size of the rented house. It is anticipated that under the new law small groups of recovering individuals will be able to rent a house in the existing housing market. To receive a loan recovering individuals must agree that first, the recovery house must be democratically run; second, it must be self-supporting; and third, individuals living in the house must be thrown out if they relapse into drinking alcohol or using drugs. It is

[1] Nan Robertson, "Getting Better; Inside Alcoholics Anonymous," William Morrow and Company, New York, 1988. P. 88.

a simple concept. It works and it is cost effective.

I urge the Secretary of Health and Human Services to work with Oxford House to implement this new program. The successful 13-year experience of Oxford House should be shared with officials and interested individuals in every State so that the concept of self-run, self-supported recovery housing can be quickly replicated throughout the country.

This new program represents a real opportunity to alleviate both the tragedy of addiction and the demand that fuels illicit drug trafficking. Recovery housing can provide the missing link in recovery from addiction. Passage of this bill begins an important new chapter in the fight against alcoholism and drug addiction by helping addicted individuals to help themselves to get better by living together in a supportive alcohol and drug free environment.

OXFORD HOUSE

In the Washington, DC area there are seventeen group houses which are home to nearly 200 individuals recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction. The Houses began 13 years ago, when a county-run halfway house closed, and have expanded solely from internally generated funds. It is truly a self-supported operation and democratically run like a college fraternity or sorority except members who relapse and use alcohol or drugs are thrown out. Each individual house is autonomous (like an AA group) and elects officers from its own members, who can only serve in office for six month periods of time. Each individual house is self-supporting. Each individual house has a charter from Oxford House, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, which is the umbrella organization that enables the membership of each house to share its experience, strength and hope with the membership of every other house.

The corporation has two distinct entities: (1) the Oxford House Service Board, which helps new houses get started and existing houses to keep in close contact with the whole group of Oxford Houses; and (2) the Oxford House Revolving Fund which loans start-up money to new houses.

Experience has shown that Oxford House fills a void in the field of treatment of alcoholism or drug addiction by providing transitional housing in a supportive environment free of alcohol or drug use. Simply stated the concept recognizes that relapse is one of the great deterrents to recovery from alcohol or drug addiction. Many individuals in the recovery process do better when given time and a safe place to live to re-enforce the principle of abstinence fostered by AA and NA.

Oxford House is a supplement to—not a replacement of—other treatment facilities including traditional half-way houses. In October 1987 Oxford House branched out from the Washington area by starting a house in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It has worked as well as the houses in Washington and demonstrated that the concept can be replicated throughout the country. Oxford House owns no property. All of its houses are rented. It is classified as family-residential for zoning purposes since no formal treatment is undertaken in the individual houses.

Oxford House is not affiliated with AA or NA and has neither of those meetings within its houses. However, individual members of Oxford House attend an average of six AA or NA meetings a week. Moreover the organization is patterned after AA and governance of the organization is through the development of consensus or group conscience.

If you would like more information about how to start an Oxford House in your area write or call the following contact people:

J. Paul Molloy, General Counsel, Oxford House, Inc., 9314 Colesville Rd., Silver Spring, Md. 20901 (301) 587-2916.

John V O'Neill, Director, Oxford House Service Board, 4911 Aurora Ave., Kensington, Md. 20895 (301) 933-6251.

THREE OXFORD HOUSES IN OPERATION

Three Oxford Houses were chosen for closer examination to give a better idea of the economics of running Oxford Houses and to examine the social interactions that make them work. The first is the Northampton house which has been in operation since November 1977 and is the second oldest Oxford House at the same location. It is in an upper middle class neighborhood of northwest Washington. The second is the Nineteenth Street house which has been in the same urban setting since March 1984. The third is the only house outside the Washington area, begun in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1987. It will serve to illustrate how a house begins away from the near proximity of the Washington houses.

The stories of the three houses give insight into the process of Oxford House residents helping one another. There is no formal treatment in Oxford Houses, yet it is a healing environment. Residents are both providers and receivers of peer assistance in learning to work, attend and understand AA and NA and to live sober. By participating in the management and assuming leadership roles in the houses, members gain self-respect and learn to interact and get along with others. Paying their own way is important for those who have cut corners for years.

Older residents make newer residents feel at home and often know where they can get a temporary job quickly or get needed medical or dental attention. The most important function of older residents may be serving as role models, proving that it's possible to stay sober, work and lead satisfying lives. Alcoholics and drug adicts, notorious for defiance of authority, are influenced by their peers just like everybody else. They don't want to be evicted from a house by their peers for failure to pay their way or for using alcohol or drugs. Removed from their old drinking and drug-using associates, they fall under the influence of a house full of people who are sober and improving their lives. Hundreds of Oxord House residents and former residents attributed their sobriety to that powerful influence.

Names in this report have been changed to protect privacy.

OXFORD HOUSE NORTHAMPTON

The Property

Oxford House Northhampton must surely be one of the finest recovery homes in the country and is probably the most comfortable residence leased by Oxford House.

It is located in an upper middle class neighborhood, one block from Chevy Chase Circle in upper northwest Washington, D.C., about a mile from the exclusive Chevy Chase Country Club. It is the last house on the end of a quiet residential street near Connecticut Avenue, a major thoroughfare.

On the west side is a branch bank and the bank's parking lot. On the east side is a residence. Across Northampton Street is the Chevy Chase city library. Along Connecticut Avenue is a short business district, the only commercial strip in the area. Within a few blocks of the house are two grocery stores, a drug store, another bank, a gasoline station, movies, and a number of restaurants and other shops. Everything a resident needs is within easy walking distance. It is on a city bus line and within walking distance of a subway stop. It is about five miles from the center of Washington and an easy commute.

The house at 3765 Northampton Street is an imposing structure with a circular driveway in front and four white pillars on the concrete front porch. Inside is a chandelier at the front of a wide hallway that runs the length of the downstairs. The hallway was painted grey-blue with white trim by a house member.

The downstairs has five large common rooms plus a kitchen and half-bath. To the right of the entrance is a paneled library which is now often used as a television room. To the left of the entrance is the living room with a television, videorecorder and working fireplace, for which the residents buy firewood. Above the fireplace are a number of large trophies won by a resident on the golf course. Behind the living room is another large room used as a dining area. Behind the library is a large kitchen with applicances found in most Oxford Houses, a drip coffeemaker and microwave oven. Each resident has his own shelf space and spot in the two large refrigerators. Behind the kitchen, in what was once probably the dining room, is a room used as sort of a combination house office and den. It has two pay telephones, which house members got as a solution to unclaimed long-distance charges. It also has a bulletin board and desk.

The second floor has seven bedrooms, three double and four single, and two full baths. Each room is carpeted, each has a television set and each television is wired for cable reception. Eight of the 13 house members have private telephones, some with answsering machines.

In the basement are three single rooms and two full baths. Also in the basement are a washer and dryer and a weight room with an exercise bicycle and punching bag.

Origin

Oxford House Northampton was begun in November, 1977, the second house the organization began in the District of Columbia and the second oldest now in operation at the same location.

Like most other Oxford House, the Northampton house was begun because those in existing houses began to feel guilty that they had a safe place to achieve sobriety, yet there were telephone calls every day from prospective applicants for whom there was no room.

The first house in the District of Columbia was started in May, 1976, in a fine upper-northwest neighborhood. In their eagerness to lease a house, the first residents took a house that was scarcely adequate for 10 people. One year later when the lease expired, the residents of that house moved about ½ mile away to a stately house on Huntington Street that was much more suitable for an Oxford House operation and is still an Oxford House today.

While there were several houses in Maryland, the Huntington Street house was the only one in the District and was swamped with applicants. One member of the house asked a friend in the real estate business to be alert for another potential Oxford House. The real estate salesman soon found the Northampton house. It had been vacant for several months, apparently because there was little demand for huge houses at the time. Some youngsters had broken in and used it as a place to congregate. There were empty beer cans and chicken bones in some of the bedrooms on moving day. A one-year lease was signed, with rent of $800

monthly with an option for a second year at the same rental.

Prior to that time, all Oxford Houses were begun with some members of existing houses moving into the new house. At the Northampton house all the members were new recruits. The first resident was Tom, a Naval Academy graduate who treated the other new residents like members of his private Navy. It was several months before they realized that the house was really run democratically and began to rebel.

One positive carryover from Tom's days in the house was that a tradition of cleanliness was established that continues to the present day. It was the first house where chores were rigidly set out and fines levied if they weren't performed.

In the early days Oxford House houses were often rented and furniture collected before a large group of potential residents was lined up to move into a house. Two residents of existing houses might become the first occupants of a house for 14 people. Once moved in they would begin taking applications. In recent years the demand is such that once word leaks out that a new house will open there is a rush of potential candidates and the house is usually full or near full before moving day. Some people at alcohol rehabilitation centers have paid rent for weeks to reserve a space in a house.

Oxford House Northampton in Operation

Discussions with several Oxford House Northampton residents reveals a firm belief that the mandatory weekly meeting is at the heart of what makes a successful house.

Members of the house feel so strongly about the required attendance at the meeting that, unlike other houses, they won't accept any new residents who can't attend the 6:30 p.m. Monday meetings. Any resident who moves into the house and can't attend on a regular basis is asked to move.

Residents feel that the meeting is the key to harmonious living. It is at the meetings that prospective members are interviewed, that house business and purchases are discussed, and where members report on subjects like cleanliness, rent due, jobs and job prospects.

Without the meetings residents say tensions can build and fester over personality conflicts or neglected responsibilities to the house. At the meetings the items that cause discord can be debated, sometimes hotly, and taken care of. A member who has been in the house five years said there has been no physical confrontations during his residency. There is a house rule that anybody who starts a fight is expelled. During June, July and August house meetings are held only every second week to allow residents to go on vacation. Members claim the house doesn't work as well during those months because house business isn't taken care of promptly.

The house meetings, while not lengthy, are to the point. Each house member is called on to name the chore he is assigned and to tell other house members whether it has been done. Back rents are discussed. In April this year, no member was over one week behind in rent.

Emphasis at the meetings often reflects the interests of the house presidents, which change every six months. Some stress cleanliness, others paying rent on time and others making sure everybody is employed, according to one resident.

The house is as well taken care of as if the members were actually the owners. Through the years the members of the house have gradually and steadily improved the property. They spend about $500 yearly on the lawn for mulch, fertilizer, garden tools and on flowers. The lawn is thick and well cared for, the hedges are trimmed and there are two birdbaths.

The care of the house has paid dividends. The owners are so pleased to have Oxford House as their tenant that they haven't raised the rent in five years. One occupant said one of the owners remarked that they have a perpetual lease with no rent increase as far as she is concerned.

The house has little turnover. In April, none of the 13 residents had moved out in seven months. The house is overwhelmed with requests for residency. One member estimated there are 15 calls weekly in times of peak demand and about eight weekly in times of slow demand. Several alcohol rehabilitation programs like the Veterans' Administration, the Psychiatric Institute and the U.S. Post Office employee assistance program refer all those needing housing to the house. There is seldom room for any of them.

Getting Accepted

When a vacancy occurs the house president calls prospective house members from a file of applicants kept at the house. Former residents get first consideration if they left the house in good standing.

The prospective residents are brought before a house meeting one at a time and asked to give a five-minute talk on why they want to move into the house. The house residents look at the application and each in turn asks the applicant questions. Then the next applicant is brought in. The process takes about 30-minutes per applicant. After two are interviewed, a vote is taken by secret ballot. If both are rejected, more are called. Members try to accept those who need the house the most and those who return time and again hoping to gain acceptance. They try to avoid those who want to move into Oxford House to mitigate a legal problem and those who aren't serious about staying sober.

Those who survive this elaborate process feel it is a privilege to get to live in the house. This feeling is reinforced when the new resident moves in and those in the house go out of their way to make him feel welcome. Old residents take him to Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings. They encourage him to get a job and help him find one if they can. It is explained to him that he is living in a good neighborhood and is expected to respect his neighbors. They also tell him in a supportive way that he is on his own, but they will be keeping an eye on him.

He is lucky in several respects. Because the owners of the property haven't raised the $1,800 monthly rent in five years, it is a very reasonable place to live in Washington, D.C. area. Weekly rental of $55 covers everything but food.

The house has features others don't have like cable television in every room not because residents have higher income than other houses, but because members take great pride in the house and its improvements.

Oxford House Northampton has eight white and five black residents ranging in age from 21 to 62, with an average age of 37. Although all misused alcohol, several of the residents primarily had problems with drugs other than alcohol. Their occupations include a marble worker, housepainter, liquor store worker, post office worker, drywall installer, telephone company worker, dispatcher, a building inspector and a man in the insurance business.

The house is sound financially and during those months when there are five weeks' rental payments collected, extra items are purchased for the house. These include a weed eater, a gas grill for the back yard, a new VCR, the microwave oven, gym equipment and a cat. The monthly gas bill averages about $300 and the electric about $150. The house spends $225 monthly on staples and $40 for the pay telephones.

While Oxford House, Inc. doesn't require any rules of houses except the prohibition on drinking and using drugs and that each member pay his share of expenses, the Northampton house is more rigid than some. For instance, guests aren't allowed in rooms between midnight and 8 a.m. The hours that the washer and dryer can be used are limited. Lying down on the couch in the library is prohibited. Rules are handed down verbally rather than new residents being handed a list of rules.

While nobody has been ejected from the house for well over a year, residents say the no drinking, no drug use rule is essential.

"I had run out of people who would help me," said Robert, a 62-year-old World War II veteran and former college basketball player. "I knew if I drank I wouldn't have any place to live. That's why you got to have a rule that if you drink or drug you're on the street immediately."

Bill, a 51-year-old post office worker who competes in golf tournaments, attributes the success of the house to peer pressure.

"Most of us had never lived with people getting clean," he said. "We had peer pressure to get alcohol and drugs, but never to stay clean.

"This place took me away from the friends I had and forced me to adapt—to stay clean. I alway preach get involved—do more."

On Christmas house members buy a tree, select names to share gifts and have a big meal. On Thanksgiving they have a large meal to give thanks.

OXFORD HOUSE NINETEENTH STREET

The Property

Oxford House Nineteenth Street is part of a three story duplex with a basement located on a reasonably quiet street near the center of Washington, D.C. The immediate area is mostly residential, with single family houses and an occasional apartment building or large house converted into apartments. It is near the Connecticut Avenue corridor of upscale homes and apartment buildings and also near the Adams-Morgan section, an ethnically mixed neighborhood of whites, blacks and recent immigrants, mostly Hispanic. Adams-Morgan has recently become a fashionable nightspot that some claim will rival the trendy Georgetown section of Washington for restaurants and nightlife.

The Oxford House has residential neighbors on both sides and is across the street from the John Quincy Adams Elementary School. Just around the corner are the Hilton Hotel where President Reagan was shot in 1981 and part of the Soviet Embassy. It is about 12 blocks from the White House.

The house is convenient to everything a resident could possibly need. There are banks within several blocks, and grocery stores, dry cleaners, drug stores and other convenience stores are nearby. It is a five minute walk to a subway stop at DuPont Circle, allowing quick access to any section of the city. This is important because only four residents have automobilies and parking is in short supply in the area. No parking places are included with the house. It is on a bus line and taxis are easy to hail in the area.

The house, at 2017 Nineteenth Street N.W., is within walking distance of the main business district of Washington where most of the residents work. It would be difficult

to find a more convenient location for an Oxford House.

The house doesn't have a great deal of common space considering that 15 people live there. The first floor has a living room in the front with relatively new furniture and a large television with remote control and a VCR with a selection of movies. There is but a small area separating the living room from a large kitchen with spacious storage space and three refrigerators. There is a drip coffeemaker, stove, microwave oven and a large dining table that seats six.

Each of the two upper floors has three double bedrooms and one bath. The basement has a separate entrance that is seldom used. It has two bedrooms, one a double and one a single, and one bath. It also has two washers and two dryers separated by a partition from the rest of the basement, and one refrigerator.

Origin

The Nineteenth Street Oxford House, although in that location only since March 1984, is a direct descendent of one of the earliest Oxford Houses.

In 1976 some Oxford House members left the second Oxford House ever established, at 41st and Fessenden Streets in the District of Columbia, to begin a third house in Silver Spring, Maryland. After several years in the Silver Spring location, the owners of the house returned from duty oveseas with the State Department and reclaimed their house. The members of the house then leased a house on Ingomar Street in Washington. After about four years at the Ingomar Street address the same thing happened, the owners returned to Washington from Michigan and moved back into their house. This time the group moved to Nineteenth Street and leased a house from an owner who intended to keep the house as a rental investment property, presumably preempting another episode of returning owners forcing an Oxford House to relocate. Members of the Nineteenth Street house were directly responsible for founding another Oxford House, which now has 15 residents, in the same area. In 1985 a small Oxford House in Takoma Park, Maryland was closing because the owner had another use for his property. Several members of the Nineteenth Street house, being friendly with a long-time resident of the Takoma Park house, began looking for a house to rent so he could start another Oxford House in the District. The same landlord who owned the Nineteenth Street house offered for lease a house on Kalorama Street in the District. For personal reasons the member from Takoma Park didn't move into the Kalorama house, but three members of the Nineteenth Street house did move. Within about one week the Kalorama house was full, again indicating the need for alcohol-free housing for recovery.

Oxford House Nineteenth Street in Operation

Several residents likened living at the Nineteenth Street Oxford House to being part of family. The glue that holds the house together is the weekly meeting, they said. Held at 7 p.m. each Tuesday, it allows members to ask new residents how they are adjusting to the house and how older residents can help them adjust. Like other houses, the meetings also deal with house finances, and during summer months when gas bills are low, how any surplus money should be spent to improve the house or yard. Perhaps the greatest function of house meetings is to allow those with any gripes or resentments against other members to air them so conflicts can be resolved rather than allowed to fester. Though usually most residents are current, past due rents are reviewed. The house is inspected before each house meeting to see if assigned chores have been performed. If they haven't they are brought up. Chores are generally done promptly because a house member can be fined a week's rent, $50, for failure to perform his chore. Minutes of past meetings are reviewed.

Getting Accepted

The house has an average of five applications for each opening, many of them coming from the Veterans Administration alcohol and drug treatment facility in Washington, other alcohol treatment units, from halfway houses or from people who are living in bad situations where others are using alcohol or drugs. Applicants appear before the house meeting where they are asked to tell about themselves; how they got into treatment; how Oxford House can be useful to them; if they have the money to live in the house; if they have 30-days of sobriety or nearly 30-days [1]; if they have problems with sharing a room. Applicants are also familiarized with Oxford House.

All applicants are discussed before a vote is taken. House members tend to accept the applicant who needs the house the most because he is newly sober, rather than the one who has been sober for a while. However, if a person who has been out of treatment for a while keeps applying for membership in the house, he probably will eventually be accepted. The house president was rejected at the Nineteenth Street house twice and at the Kalorama house once before being accepted last July.

Although like all Oxford Houses there is no mandatory atttendance at AA or NA meetings, members of the house are strongly encouraged to participate when they gain admittance, and 14 of 15 house members regularly attend. It would be unusual to find two residents at the house at the 8 and 10 p.m. meeting time. New residents are invited to attend meetings with old residents.

Every new resident has a roommate and isn't allowed to become isolated. One house member wasn't seen but briefly for a long period of time, so several residents visited him at his job site to see if he was having problems. They found that he was merely having to work long hours.

The house is about evenly divided between those whose drug of choice was alcohol and those whose drugs of choice were other than alcohol. Although odorless, it isn't difficult to tell if somebody is using drugs, residents assert. Behavior changes are a sure giveaway. People on drugs act differently, they say. "I know I couldn't come here and be using . . . somebody would know," said a resident. "I would want to be in my room alone and people would know something was wrong."

In the past year only one resident was voted out of the house for using alcohol or drugs and two others left on their own under suspicious circumstances. The Nineteenth Street house has instituted a rule on knowledge of drinking that resembles the honor codes at the military academies. If a person knows that another is drinking or using drugs and fails to report him, he too is banished from the house.

The 15 residents are in their 20s, 30s and 40s, with an average age of 37, the youngest being 24 and the oldest 49. Twelve are black and three are white. At least six are veterans and another is on active military duty. Their occupations include a government worker, mortician, two construction workers, two hospital workers, two restaurant workers, a counselor for the handicapped, a painter, a railroad conductor, a carpenter, a luggage store worker, a correctional center worker and a maintenance worker at a school. Two have been in Oxford House over six years and five more between one and five years. Seven have been in the house less than a year, with an average of six months each.

Monthly rental is $1,800 with an average gas bill of $500 monthly and electric bill of $290. The house spends $200 monthly on staples like sugar, coffee and paper products.

The house is like a family, said a resident who is a railroad conductor. "Everybody is concerned with what's going on. Lots of times there will be five or six of us in the kitchen at 1 a.m. talking about our lives and the house. it's a good house. I'm glad I'm here."

"If I had to go back to my old environment I doubt I would make it," said the house president, a maintenance worker at a day care center who moved in last July. "I go back to my old neighborhood because I have kids, and get the old feelings. Oxford House is a safe, pleasant place to go after work.

"This is how I would want it to be at my house if I had one," he said. "Everybody has a chore. We sit down and go over the bills. If somebody has a problem we sit down and talk about and try to help."

OXFORD HOUSE BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

The Property

The Oxford House in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania is a large, solid, three-story, white brick house. It is located in a neglected older section of Bethlehem that is now a mix of businesses and residents. Although a single house, it is situated just a few feet from the neighboring house on one side and is separated only by an alleyway and a small yard from the neighbor on the other side. Across the street is a huge German-Catholic church. It is an easy walk from the house to the grocery store, bank and other convenience stores. Several blocks away is Lehigh University and some of the housing in the area is rented to students. Several row houses in the neighborhood have been turned into low-price hamburger and hot-dog restaurants.

The house was once divided into two apartments for rental. There are three large common rooms and one bedroom on the first floor. The front room is the living room where the television is playing most of the time. The center room, which was once the dining room, has a telephone, desk and a couch and serves as the house office. Off the hall leading from the office toward the kitchen is a bedroom for two with a full-bath across the hall. In the back is a large kitchen with two dining tables, two large refrigerators, and a drip coffeemaker. Because so many house members prepared prepackaged frozen foods, one of the first purchases once the house was on its feet was a microwave oven.

On the second floor are four bedrooms and one bath. Three of the bedrooms are occupied by two residents each and a fourth tiny bedroom has one resident. The third floor has a large front bedroom with two occupants and a large unfinished, unheated area used for storage. The basement, which appeared like a dungeon when the house was first leased, has been painted and the front room converted into a weight room. Also in the front room is a washer and dryer. The back part is for storage.

The house is large enough so that it doesn't seem crowded, even with 10 resi-

[1] Although there is no requisite period of sobriety for admittance to Oxford House, some houses have established time periods they consider important before admitting new members.

dents. It is "big enough so that you find a place to be alone, sort of, but you're not really alone," said one resident.

The house is reasonably well furnished throughout. In addition to a small truckload of furniture sent up by the Washington houses, house members scrounged the remainder and have spent less than $200 on furniture, and that included $75 for a large color television.

Origin

The Oxford House in Bethlehem is one of the newest Oxford Houses and the only one not in the Washington, D.C. area.

The idea for the house began in the summer of 1987 when one of the founders of Oxford House, a former staff member for the Congress, ran into former congressman Fred Rooney, with whom he had once worked. Rooney, who knew about Oxford House, mentioned that it was too bad that Oxford House didn't have houses in Pennsylvania because his home place in Bethlehem was for sale. The former Oxford House member told him Oxford House didn't purchase property, but perhaps a lease would be possible. Rooney, along with his partner Bill Werpehowski, arranged for him and another Oxford House founder to see the house in August and to meet with Sally Gillispie who directs alcohol programs for the county. Gillispie, whose responsibilities included a large halfway house in neighboring Allentown, said there was a need for transitional housing and agreed that the halfway house would be a good source of residents for Oxford House.

Rooney and Werpehowski, who owns a real estate business in Bethlehem, agreed to lease the house to Oxford House for several years for $1,000 monthly. In late September the first referral, Frank, moved into the house at 426 Carlton Avenue.

To prevent any possibility of a zoning dispute, Rooney and Werpehowski sent the Oxford House literature to city officals who ruled that the house fell within the definition of a "family" and the city issued a certificate of occupancy.

Oxford House Bethlehem in Operation

Oxford House Bethlehem was the first house in many years begun away from the day-to-day influence of the Washington house and the deck seemed stacked against it from the beginning. The main problem, because of a misunderstanding, was a lack of residents and inability to meet expenses.

The first resident, and the people at the halfway house who were to recommend residents for Oxford House, somehow got the notion that three or four months sobriety were required for Oxford House residency. By limiting occupancy to those with several months sobriety, the pool of potential residents shrunk to almost nothing before the house ever opened. Those who had managed to stay sober several months had already made other living arrangements.

The first resident lived alone in the house for about six weeks. During that time he made a number of physical improvements, including trimming some overgrown hedges and painting much of the downstairs, but the house was no nearer self-sufficiency than when he moved in.

Since the Oxford Houses in Washington didn't have any seed money set aside for the Bethlehem house, it was in a precarious position. A private loan from an Oxford House resident in Washington picked up the first month's rent. In the second month the Washington houses sent $600 and a truckload of furniture.

In early November two additional residents of the halfway house moved in and the members began to pull together to make it work.

A neighbor gave them a television set. A resident bought some dressers from a neighbor. They did little things to establish a precedent of keeping the house straight and clean.

The Lehigh Valley is a depressed area with Bethlehem Steel having cut back from about 20,000 to about 6,000 employees in the last decade. Two residents were out of work and the first Thanksgiving they had to get some food from a food bank.

The Bethlehem House was operating according to the Oxford House manual, but the manual never dealt with where to get new residents. The Houses in Washington were unaware of the belief in Bethlehem that 3-4 months of sobriety were required. In retrospect, it was largely the fault of the Washington houses for not making sure Bethlehem knew that residents could come from a variety of places and that there were no absolute sobriety requirements.

One of the Oxford House founders, who had a son at Lehigh University, would make brief visits periodically. When he found out the house requirement, he suggested that they fill the house the best way they could and pay the bills, If a person drank or used drugs he could be evicted immediately.

House members set a weekly rental of $50, plus a $5 surcharge for staples like toilet paper and coffee. By the end of November there were five residents. By January 1, there were six, still hardly enough to make a go of it, especially with the high heating bills of winter.

Once they knew that no period of sobriety was required for residency, they became more aggressive in their recruiting. Two men stayed for a month and left. At times they felt like it might not work, but they never quit.

Slowly membership in the house climbed, reaching 10 by early April. At that time all bills were paid and over $1,000 was in the bank, more than was needed to pay May's rent. Further, the house asked about repaying the $1,600 loaned by the people in Washington.

The average electric bill for the house has been $100, with oil averaging $90 and gas $30. Residents spend about $200 monthly on staples. They bought a microwave oven and were talking of other accessories for the house.

There are nine white residents and one black, with an average age of 43. Nine of the house members used alcohol as their drug of choice.

Strong bonds were formed while staying sober and solving problems together. By April the house members knew the house was there to stay and confidently spoke of being able to handle other problems that came their way.

Some of the examples of personal friendships in the house are moving. For instance, in January when the bills were behind, one resident went to the local detoxification unit and found a 58-year black man who had lost a leg while drinking and who had been hospitalized 12 times for alcoholism the prior year.

Some residents didn't think it would be a good idea to accept him because he had so much physical damage he couldn't be fitted with an artificial leg and would never be able to walk or hold a job, had relapsed often, and shook so badly he couldn't even feed himself. Some argued that he would be better off in a nursing home-type facility.

Nonetheless, the need to pay the bills was great and he was voted in.

As the man recovered he began to carry his own weight. He refused to allow other residents to take his clothing downstairs to the washing machine, instead washing it by hand himself. He took on the chore of keeping the downstairs floors clean and would get out of his wheelchair and crawl around the floor to get the job done. "I won't ask them to do anything I can do myself," he said.

He also began to talk a lot about the wreckage of his drinking years and how to avoid the same mistakes again, a never-ending topic of conversation in Oxford Houses. By April he was not only an accepted member of the house, but a popular member. He is proud of the four months without a drink and grateful to have an Oxford House to live in. "If they hadn't taken me in I don't know what would have happened to me," he said.

"This proves that just because somebody has handicaps and disabilities it doesn't mean they can't be a positive force," said Steve, the first house president.

Gratitude for Oxford House and the chance it offers for sobriety is a common theme.

Carl, for instance, a middle-aged test engineer for a large company, tried to get into two halfway houses before leaving a 28-day rehabilitation program, but the houses were full. Fearful of getting drunk if on his own and aware that he was once called legally dead after a series of alcoholic seizures, he found Oxford House and likes the philosophy of self-help. "I've been here a month and I don't think I would have lasted that long out there (without drinking)"

Steve, the twice-divorced father of two who was the first resident, had experienced successes in the past as a restaurant manager, restaurant supply salesman, service station operator, real estate salesman and maintenance worker. But for six years prior to getting sober he lived in a cabin in the woods without electricity where he said he worked when he had to and partied all the time.

After getting sober in the Veterans Administration hospital and a stay at the halfway house in Allentown, Pennsylvania he moved into Oxford House. He began the first house president and began to accept responsibility again. He began working for a contractor on a job for Bethlehem Steel for $6.00 hourly. That was quickly raised to $6.50 and then $9.00 hourly and his status seemed secure. One evening in April Steve and his supervisor were sharing a cup of coffee in the Oxford House Kitchen.

"It really helps me a lot knowing that if I drink or use drugs I'm out," he said. "I don't have to make the decision, it's made for me. It makes it easier to stay sober."

The house president in April was Don, a six-year Navy veteran who later worked 20 years for the state of New Jersey and raised five children before getting into serious trouble with alcohol. He had once unsuccessfully tried to stay sober in a small private room above a bar.

Don liked the freedom from the regimentation that exists in halfway houses. "We are not under the pressure of being under somebody's thumb," he commented.

The members of the Bethlehem house are older on average than most Oxford Houses and are "mature enough that there aren't any serious personality problems to solve," he said. "The house just seems to have clicked * * * to have taken off."

Six of the 10 residents were veterans and Don attributed time in the armed services to stability in the house. People with military training have lived together "and when they see tension coming, they can work around it," he said.

Several of the veterans had been through the alcohol program at the Lyons, N.J. VA hospital and some had met there before eventually ending up in Oxford House.

At some houses parking is a problem. At the Bethlehem house, because of drunk driving arrests or because they are just getting on their feet, only two residents had cars. The Bethlehem house was probably more lenient on past due rent than any other house with the majority of residents behind at least a week in rent.

The neighbors know who they are and their purpose and they have been welcomed. One neighbor gave them a television set that lasted several months. Another sent over a platter of food on New Year's Eve. The neighbors are appreciative that a run-down property has been improved and comment on improvements like flowers and the fresh paint. "We have 10 guys who can fix things up. We can't go outside on a nice day and not have people say 'hello'," said Steve.

Gillispie, the county director of alcohol programs, said the men in Oxford House had made a believer out of her and she would be willing to participate in any future houses. She spoke of the need for a house for women in the area.

Werpehowski, who had been a cooperative and understanding landlord, said he was impressed with what was going on at the house and would be willing to find another house for lease to Oxford House, perhaps in Allentown. That matter was to be put before the Oxford House board.

OXFORD HOUSE RESIDENT SURVEY, SPRING 1988

Introduction

During the Spring 1988, the residents of all 13 (there are now 18) Oxford Houses in the Washington, D.C., Maryland and Pennsylvania areas were asked to participate in a short, self-administered, confidential survey. Of 125 persons in the houses, 96 (77 percent) answered the voluntary survey. Respondents were not asked to identify themselves on the survey.

The marginal data were computer generated useing the SPSSX statistical package. The data was analyzed by William H. Spillane PH.D.

The purpose of the survey is to describe characteristics of house residents and document the value of the Oxford House concept as a key component in recovery of alcoholics and/or drug addicts.

Some of the more striking findings are that virtually all respondents found Oxford House crucial to their recovery, and they attend an average of six Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings weekly, a remarkable number since no AA or NA meetings are compulsory and none are held in the houses.

Descriptive Findings

Survey participants are male (87 percent) [2] and employed full or part-time (84 percent).

Average gross monthly income is $1,040.

29 percent are between the ages of 18-29; 41 percent are between the ages of 29-39; and 30 percent are older than 39.

55 percent had no military service and 13 respondents didn't answer this item.

56 are caucasian; 40 percent are black.

73 percent are single; 8 percent are separated.

80 percent have finished high school; 36 percent have some college.

One-fourth used Oxford House in a first attempt to get sober or straight; 26 percent had tried to get sober five or more times.

50 percent had been sober one year or longer; of that 50 percent, 18 percent had been sober two years or more, and 14 percent had been sober three years or more.

29 percent had not been admitted to a detoxification unit; 28 percent had been detoxed at least once; and 43 percent had been detoxed two or more times.

79 percent had been to at least one in-patient or out-patient substance abuse treatment program; 29 percent reported being admitted to a substance abuse treatment program three or more times.

39 percent reported being homeless at some time in their lives; 20 percent were homeless for six months or more; and 12 percent were homeless for one-year or more.

97 percent reported that Oxford House was important to their continued sobriety; 80 percent called it "very important."

99 percent percent said they would recommend Oxford House to other alcoholics or drug abusers in early recovery.

80 percent attend Alcoholics Anonymous weekly; 43 percent attend four or more AA meetings per week.

58 percent attend Narcotics Anonymous weekly; with 25 percent attending five or more meetings per week.

45 percent attend both AA and NA meetings each week. When AA and NA are combined, respondents attend an average of six meetings per week.

41 percent receive additonal counseling.

95 percent report their health as "very good" or "pretty good".

51 percent had resided in Oxford House for nine months or longer; 24 percent had four or fewer months of residence; and 10 percent had lived in Oxford House for three or more years.

---

[2] Since the survey a house for eight women has opened in the District of Columbia and a house for twelve women.